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## Discontinuous intersections: second-generation immigrant girls in transition from school to work

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# **Discontinuous Intersections: Second Generation Immigrant Girls in Transition from School to Work**

## **Abstract**

This article provides a theoretical framework for analysing discrimination against second generation immigrant girls in education and the labour market by proposing an intersectional approach. Drawing upon selected elements of the findings of our Neskak Gora Project – a qualitative research conducted between 2009-2011 in Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK and funded by the EC Daphne III Programme – we show that the intersection of class, gender and “race”/ethnicity, which is at play at the structural, institutional and discursive levels of systems of intersectional discrimination, works in variable ways. While gender seems partly to benefit female immigrant youth at school, gendered disadvantages are experienced particularly in the transition to the labour market. This highlights the necessary acknowledgement of the “discontinuity” of axes of inequality that are manifested in different ways, according to specific contexts, institutional settings and moments of the individual’s life cycle.

**Keywords:** Second generation immigrants; intersectionality; gender, race and class discrimination; education; labour market; inequalities.

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

This article seeks to provide a theoretical framework for analysing discrimination against second generation immigrant girls in education and the labour market by proposing an intersectional approach. The point of departure of our article is constituted by the Neskak Gora Project (NGP), a sociological and legal research project conducted in 2010-2011, funded by the EC Daphne III Programme. The NGP aimed to explore the mechanisms leading to discrimination and exclusion of second generation young women between 12-21 years old of North African and South Asian descent in six EU member states – Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK.<sup>2</sup> Quantitative and qualitative techniques were adopted for the gathering

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<sup>2</sup> We refer to the children of immigrants as “second generation immigrant

of data. The former included secondary analysis of national and regional statistics related to the numerical and social morphology of North African and South Asian immigrants, first and second generation, and of OECD and Eurostat data on scholastic achievements and labour market participation of second generation immigrant youth in each country, while the latter were collected through in-depth interviews with 36 key respondents (i.e., second generation immigrant girls aged 12-21, ethnic community representatives, NGO representatives, teachers and vocational/career advisors). Furthermore, due both to the great difference between data sets (or lack thereof) for the six countries concerning second generation immigrant youth, and to the prevalence of case studies focused on second generation migrants of specific nationalities, or conducted at local (city council) level, a great deal of our project entailed compiling an extensive overview of the relevant literature in all six languages supplementing our own data. A complete overview of the NGP's findings and methodology is available online at the

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youth” since this has become an internationally adopted category in specialist literature and has enabled us to include the different definitions that are used in each of the countries under investigation. Nonetheless, we appreciate some of the criticisms that have been made of this concept; for instance the fact that this definition misrepresents people as “immigrants”, who are frequently born in the country to which their parents migrated, and often possess the nationality in question.

NGP's website.<sup>3</sup>

This article aims to develop a more theoretical reflection on discrimination against second generation immigrant girls at school and in the transition to the labour market, drawing upon selected elements of our findings. In doing this, we focus in particular on the significant similarities between the trajectories of discrimination at school and in the labour market in the six countries. The main goal of this article in fact is to propose a theoretical framework that builds upon the conceptual apparatus provided by intersectionality theory.

As numerous studies show, discrimination against second generation immigrant youth results from broader dynamics of social inequalities produced and reproduced through the exclusion of immigrants from access to economic, cultural and social capital as well as symbolic power (e.g. Brinbaum and Kieffer 2009). South Asian and North African communities across Europe, as well as immigrants from other regions of the Global South more generally, are placed in the lowest strata of society. Though forms of social mobility have been increasingly witnessed, the career paths of immigrants' children still tend to follow trajectories of exclusion largely as a result of their unprivileged social background. However, despite the increasingly rich literature on second generation immigrant youth in Europe,

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<sup>3</sup> See 'Scientific Findings of the Neskak Gora Project on Second Generation Immigrant Girls and Young Women from North Africa and South Asian Families in Europe' available at: <[www.neskakgora.org](http://www.neskakgora.org)>

little attention has been paid to the specific experiences of second generation immigrant girls.<sup>4</sup> While groundbreaking studies have shed light on the paths of integration of the second as compared to the first generation of immigrants (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008; Vermeulen 2010), more work is needed on the specific interplay of “race”, class and gender in particular in directing these paths. This article, thus, will attempt to offer some keys for reading the intersection of these factors in light of the distinct experiences of second generation immigrant girls.

### **Intersectional discrimination**

In order to highlight the way second generation immigrant girls face discrimination and exclusion, our approach has been informed by the theoretical tools provided by the theory of intersectionality in general and the concept of “intersectional discrimination” in particular. The latter concept refers, in its strictest sense, “to a situation in which there is a specific type of discrimination, in which several grounds of discrimination interact” (Makkonen 2002, p. 11). While its popularity has increased in both academic circles and at policy levels, there is no unanimously shared definition of the concept of intersectional discrimination.

On the one hand, the notion of discrimination – whose precise meaning

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<sup>4</sup> Some exceptions to this trend include: Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005; Thomsen, Moldenhawer, Kallehave 2010.

varies according to the contexts and disciplinary boundaries within which it is used, whether in legal, political or sociological fields – indicates generally the subordination and exclusion which are experienced by individuals on the basis of certain characteristics they either possess, or with which they are associated.

On the other hand, intersectionality denotes – to cite one of its broader definitions – “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah and Phoenix 2004, p. 76). One of the most important aspects of intersectional theory for an understanding of discrimination is the notion that discrimination is not (only) simply additional or multiplicative, but expresses a *specific* interplay between different ‘axes’ that cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts. One of the most challenging tasks of our research was an application of intersectional discrimination theory that could respond to the specificities of the discriminatory setting in question. For this purpose, we identified three main dimensions of intersectional discrimination, each interacting with the other, or in conjunction. They are listed separately only for the sake of analytical clarity. The three dimensions are: 1) structural; 2) institutional and 3) discursive.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Albeit inspired by the fourfold typology of intersecting systems of oppression – i.e., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal – developed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), our typology differs in that it

*Structural intersectional discrimination* describes the situation in which discrimination results from the intersection between different “structural” systems of subordination. The latter refers to an enduring and trans-individual societal setting, which disadvantages less empowered groups while advantaging, at the same time, the dominant group. In this specific case, four structural systems of discrimination associated with our target group can be identified. a) a system based on sex/gender resulting from patriarchal power relationships, or hierarchical gender orders; b) a system based on “race”/ethnicity and resulting from “racial”/colonial power relationships; c) a system based on religion (particularly Islam) and resulting from one specific configuration of contemporary “racial”/ethnic discrimination in Western societies, which translates into the stigmatisation of Islam as such; d) a system based on social class resulting from economic and political power relationships.

*Institutional intersectional discrimination* refers to the practices that produce discriminatory treatment based on different grounds within a determinate institutional setting. Intersectional discrimination occurring within determined institutions is nurtured by structural discrimination, despite these organisations issuing rules that either enhance, or reduce the reproduction of specific types of discrimination. Since we focus on two

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merges the disciplinary and hegemonic into the institutional dimension and considers the interpersonal system of oppression as part of the larger discursive level of intersectional discrimination.



central institutions – school and the work place – it is essential to consider the institutional dimension of discrimination, i.e., the specific policies, regulations and practices that affect second generation immigrant girls and young women.

Finally, *discursive intersectional discrimination* describes the situation in which discrimination results from the intersection of discursive formations, which (re)produce images of inferiority for determinate subjects and groups. The creation of stereotypes, in particular, involves all those images developed by the members of a society that feed on structural and institutional discrimination, which do not only nourish the latter, but that are also detectable at a more personal level. These can be regarded as the crystallisations, at discursive and representational levels, of axes of discrimination structurally and institutionally present in a determinate society in a defined spatial-temporal context, or what Crenshaw calls “representational intersectionality”, as the “cultural construction” of particular subject positions (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1282).

### **Second Generation Immigrant Youth in Education**

As a central institution of every society and individuals’ lives from a very early age, intersectional discrimination operating in an educational context lies precisely at the junctions of the structural/systemic, institutional and discursive layers discussed above. Considered strictly in its institutional capacity, the education system(s) provides various mechanisms of both

selection and discrimination that are common to all, and specific to each country under investigation. Regardless of their sex/gender and “ethnic”/national origin, the scholastic achievements of second generation immigrant youth in the six countries in question effectively present very similar trends. As Brinbaum and Kieffer (2009) argue for the French case, “educational inequalities take root very early” (p. 515) and “the path through primary school has a lasting impact on a student’s entire subsequent school career” (p. 533). Evidence supporting the general applicability of this statement beyond France can be found in the fact that the large majority of boys and girls with an immigrant background in the six European contexts identified (with the partial exception of the UK, see Figure 1a and 1b) either have high percentages of dropping out or attend VET programmes and technical institutes, while very few enroll in school levels which can lead to higher education. In Italy (Benasso et al. 2010), France (Brinbaum and Kieffer 2009) and Spain (Portes et al. 2009) most children with immigrant parents can be found in vocational/technical schools. A wealth of literature in the UK has discussed the under-achievement of pupils from some ethnic minorities in particular (Caribbean, Pakistani), highlighting the role of social class and the differences between ethnic groups (Fry et al. 2008). In Denmark and the Netherlands, second generation youth attains better educational results when compared to the first generation, but still underachieves when compared to non immigrant pupils (Stevens et al. 2011).

**Figure 1a AROUND HERE.**

What are the main reasons for the inferior performance of second generation immigrant students and their predominant location in vocational secondary schools? How do class, “race” and gender, in particular, intersect at a structural, institutional and discursive level to produce these results? We should primarily note that North African and South Asian families’ low socio-occupational status, low education levels, or lack of recognition of their qualifications, as well as their difficulties in mastering the language of the “receiving context”, are all elements likely to affect enduringly and profoundly their children’s school experience. This can be detected in at least three ways:

(a) *Pupils’ language gaps*: One of the elements most invoked in accounting for immigrant children’s poor achievements throughout Europe is the language gap (Andriessen and Phalet 2002; Colding et al. 2005). This is largely due to the initial linguistic difficulties of their parents as first generation immigrants, which are experienced by immigrants’ children as factors of cultural and symbolic disempowerment, but also as practical obstacles when their parents cannot help them with their homework. Here it should be noted that the emphasis on the linguistic deficits of second generation immigrant youth reflects a mono-cultural approach according to which “linguistic diversity [particularly when it concerns non-Western immigrants] is understood in terms of deficits and special needs”, instead of recognising bilingualism as an asset (Horst and Gitz-Johansen 2010, p. 145).

(b) *Attendance of schools with poor educational environments.* As many studies emphasise, educational and residential segregation are closely linked (Portes and Hao, 2004). Immigrant families from North Africa and South Asia most often reside at the periphery or in the poorest areas of European cities. It is here that schools which offer inadequate educational environments are concentrated (van Zanten 2001; Weekes-Bernard 2007; Bosisio et al., 2005), where teachers usually adopt the method of “levelling down” (Duru-Bellat 2002; Crul and Doornik 2003), thereby reinforcing initial gaps and creating what some authors have called segregation and “educational ghettos” (Maurin 2004). One example is provided by the failure of the ZEPs (Zone Education Prioritaire, now Réseau de Réussite Éducative) in France. Though created in order to tackle the problems of poorer neighbourhoods and schools, they have not produced the expected results because the injustice which this experiment aimed to reduce is mainly the result of structural social inequalities.

(c) *Teachers “reinforcing” paths:* The tendency of teachers to reinforce the educational and broad social gaps of immigrants’ children by advising them to choose vocational schools, thereby reinforcing and perpetuating a situation of social inequality for second generation youth, has been highlighted by numerous studies (Moldenhawer et al. 2008; Alba and Waters 2011). The real problem, however, lies in the way the European education system manages the processes of path choices. Teachers’ path advice, in fact, result from the organisation of the educational system which imposes early paths for children in ways that, depending on the country, will

have an enduring impact on their lives.

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As already noted, the situation described above constitutes both a common denominator in the countries where our research took place; it applies to most children of immigrants from our target groups regardless of their sex and nationality; and reflects a general European trend. Yet, albeit in modest percentages and in still indeterminate forms, second generation immigrant girls' school performance appears to be better, when compared to that of their male peers of the same nationality. As highlighted in a recent OECD report, in all European countries the female children of immigrants have higher levels of scholastic achievement than male children (see 2009, p. 19). Why is this the case?

### **Gender Dimensions of Intersectionality at School**

The few studies that have addressed the specificity of second generation immigrant girls at school (particularly those from a Muslim background), have focused on the so-called 'headscarf issue'. The latter has become prominent in public and scholarly debates, particularly after the 2004 French law against ostensible religious symbols in public schools (Scott 2007). However, despite the salience of this issue, which has already generated countless publications and the importance of which was also noted in our interviews, we will attempt instead to analyse a phenomenon that has received less attention: namely, second generation immigrant girls' better

school achievements. In its limited empirical scope, our inquiry confirms this phenomenon. However, the analysis of this phenomenon requires us to move beyond a mere statistical registration or an a-critical celebration.

As several studies, particularly in the UK (Arnot et al. 1999) have demonstrated, the school achievements of boys are lower than those of girls regardless of their ethnic background. Research findings in Europe show that the differences in attainments between boys and girls are less when they come from high socio-economic classes, and greater when they have a poorer socio-economic background. Particularly among working class youth, images and models of masculinity translate into highly counter-school postures (Willis 1977; Mirza 1992; Epstein D. et al, 1998). Second generation immigrant girls' better school achievements, thus, need to be understood in the context of general female scholastic successes, and not only of second generation boys' under-achievements. When the terms of comparison become the female school population in general, the situation immediately appears less positive. Second generation immigrant girls' achievements are in fact still significantly lower compared with those of their female non-immigrant peers (again with the exception of the UK, see Figure 2b). Not only are they still under-represented in secondary school paths leading to higher education, but they also have higher dropout rates compared to those of young girls of non-immigrant origin (Moldenhawer et al., 2008).

**Figure 1b AROUND HERE**

In light of this, we need to ask how “race”/ethnicity and class intersect with gender at the structural, institutional and discursive levels to generate a situation of both hampering and support for these girls? Why are the school achievements of second generation immigrant girls better than those of their male peers of the same “race”/ethnicity, but, at the same time, significantly lower when compared with those of “native” girls? The rare studies that have attempted to address the complexity of this situation, albeit still limited, have concentrated on the educational success of second generation immigrant girls. On the one hand, they regard it as symptomatic of ethnic minorities women’s “greater desire for emancipation” (Guénif-Souilamas 2000; Moldenhawer et al. 2008). On the other hand, “by way of gendered socialization processes in family upbringing and school”, these girls are seen as being “more adaptive to the demands of the education system than are boys” (Thomsen et al. 2010, p. 65). However, while girls’ emancipatory ambitions and gender performances can play an important role in making their educational attainments more successful in comparison to those of their male peers, one should be careful of resorting either to “rational-choice like” explanations which locate the reasons for this result at the level of individual decisions, or of generalising the theory of gender performativity beyond determinate cultural and national contexts. To understand this phenomenon in all its complexity, we argue, a broader and more articulated picture is required. For this aim, two aspects highlighted by the intersectional approach in particular can be of help: (a) second generation

immigrant girls' "bridging" role and (b) major family and community control over women.

African American feminists in the United States have argued that women of colour and of ethnic minorities often play the role of "bridges" (see Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). As women in general are regarded as the "bearers of the collective" (Yuval-Davis 1997), and women from ethnic minorities in particular are often addressed as the vectors of cultural integration (Kofman et al. 2000; Vasta 2007), they are asked to play the role of "pipelines" between the family, the community and society as a whole. When we turn our attention to the specific emphasis on gender roles from both ethnic communities and the receiving society itself in the case of second generation immigrant girls, the bridging role represents a situation of both opportunities and burdens. According to the Open Society report (2011), those female students who are allowed to carry on with their education have shown better performance than boys, since girls usually stay at home after school and do their homework. On the one hand, since school is a crucial component of families' upward mobility strategies, girls are often treated as the agents who can realise the family's dreams of social climbing (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005). Several of our interviewees have highlighted how parents invest in their education and make them feel responsible for the good functioning of the whole family.

On the other hand, second generation immigrant girls often feel that it is their responsibility to "cleanse" the negative stereotypes concerning their ethnic group by performing well and becoming a role model for the whole



community. Girls' better performance, thus, can be seen as the result of multiple, intersecting pressures located at the structural, institutional as well as discursive levels of intersectional discrimination. For instance, Fatima (Spain, twenty years old, Moroccan parents) says:

*After school I had to go home. I could not stay around, go to bars like other Spanish girls of my age (...) Sometimes this made me feel very sad, I was a bit envious of them (...) now I think my parents did well, I am grateful to them for this. I could concentrate on my study.*

Unlike Fatima, however, other interviewees have expressed in less favourable, although contradictory, terms what they perceived as a different treatment reserved for them in comparison with their female and male peers, or brothers. As a consequence, a paradoxical situation occurs: the maintenance of traditional gender roles in the home, which sometimes means deprivation of certain liberties, can push girls to concentrate on academic success (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005, p. 1092). Such a paradoxical result, however, should not lead to generalisations such as the claim that major parental control, particular in Muslim families, is due to the fact that they are inherently patriarchal. Likewise, it should not lead to the assumption that gender control automatically leads to better scholastic achievements. The exceptional situation of exclusion and opportunities, control and "responsibilisation" in which second generation immigrant girls find themselves needs to be deciphered in light of the different orders, or

regimes, based on the intersection of gender, class and “race” in which they participate.

## **Second Generation Immigrant Youth in the Labour Market**

It needs to be noted at the outset that the generally disadvantaged position of second generation youth in education has a detrimental effect on their later position in the labour market. At the same time, there are some obstacles that are *specifically* gendered.

*Labour position of second generation immigrants:* Comparisons between the first and second generation of immigrants paint a rosy picture of the upward social mobility of the latter and their increased integration in the labour market of the host country (Open Society 2011, p. 113). However, when the focus is shifted away from intergenerational mobility to documenting the position of this group in relation to others of their age, several of these studies indicate that second generation immigrants are disadvantaged in the European OECD countries (see Figure 2a and 2b): they are disproportionally unemployed; working in precarious jobs; experience longer waiting times before obtaining their first job; are overqualified for their jobs; or are forced to become self-employed due to lack of access to the mainstream labour market (Nielsen 2003; Meurs, Pailhé and Simon 2006; de Graaf and van Zenderen 2009; OECD 2009; Tomás and Crespo 2010).

**Figure 2a and 2b AROUND HERE.**

*Discriminatory Tendencies in the Labour Market:* One of the key underlying questions in (the often quantitative) studies on the position of second generation immigrants in the labour market is whether relative inequalities between the employment status of second generation immigrants and their “native” counterparts can be accounted for on the basis of their disadvantaged educational level, social background, language skills, age and family composition, or whether inequalities persist even among similarly positioned “native” young people after correcting for these other variables. Conclusions point to the persistent force of discriminatory mechanisms that influence the labour market prospects of second generation immigrants (Meurs, Pailhé and Simon 2006; OECD 2009). However, these studies fail to analyse the different dimensions of these discriminatory mechanisms, namely, how different categories of class, gender and “race”/ethnicity interact.

*Transition to the Labour Market:* It is important to recognise that so far, comparatively little attention has been paid in the literature to the *transition* from education to work, even though it has been tentatively suggested that the transition is especially problematic (Crul and Doornik 2003).<sup>6</sup> One of

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<sup>6</sup> Analysis of participation in the labour force is often separated from school achievement; labour market data in some countries is made available only for the entire 15-65 age group. Furthermore, as second generation youth is

the aspects to which attention should be paid is the accessibility of internships and apprenticeships for second generation immigrant youth, since they are over-represented in lower-level educational schools where internships and/or apprenticeships are often compulsory for completing the programme. There is evidence that discrimination in the recruitment for internships is widespread (see Vitalis 2004; Rockwool Fondens Forskningsenhed 2008). In Denmark, for instance, the most important reason for not completing VET education has been the lack of apprenticeships for immigrant students (Jakobsen and Smith 2003).

Similarly, discrimination has been documented at the recruitment stage. Research in France, the Netherlands and Denmark, in which fictitious, identical application letters with the same qualifications but different ethnic origin were sent, showed that those with a “foreign” name had a lower chance of being invited for an interview (Dupray and Moullet 2004; OECD 2008; Andriessen et al. 2010). This difference was greater for lower-level jobs, where non-Western immigrants are traditionally over-represented. Furthermore, indirect discrimination can be detected when vacancies are communicated through personal networks. As the social capital of second generation immigrants is usually lower, they are in a disadvantaged position to obtain jobs (Crul and Doormerik 2003; Dupray and Moullet 2004; Colding et al. 2005).

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still a relatively young generation, there is not yet much data on this group.

## Gendered Dimensions of Intersectionality at Work

While many of the previously mentioned studies are attentive to gender differences in the labour market status of this group – for example with aggregated statistics, see Figure 2b –, more work is needed to understand intersectional discriminatory mechanisms that play a role in (access to) the labour market. The fact that such intersectional analysis is still far from commonplace is illustrated, for example, in the 2008 OECD Policy Brief on Ending Job Discrimination. The first sentence of the policy brief, which reads “*Women and ethnic minorities* still find it harder to get a good job than other workers in OECD countries, and are more likely to be paid less [...]” (OECD 2008, p. 1 our italics), begs the question of what the situation is for *ethnic minority women*. This “blindness” to the latter’s condition was already signaled by Hull’s, Bell Scott’s and Smith’s famous intervention in 1982 in their book *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*, and is still very present today. The subsequent sections, therefore, will attempt to fill this gap by showing three examples of intersectional discrimination in the transition to the labour market, specifically focusing on the intersection of ethnicity and religion with gender.

*Headscarves in the Labour Market:* The first example refers to the now much debated issue of intolerance towards women wearing headscarves. In all our research project’s six focus countries, discrimination in the labour

market against second generation young immigrant women who wear a headscarf has been documented especially at the recruitment stage, both for internships and for jobs (Andreassen and Siim 2007; Ahmed and Dale 2008; Gerritsen and de Graaf 2011). Despite the fact that there are often no laws directly forbidding the wearing of headscarves at work, women who do so still face discrimination on a structural, institutional and discursive level in the ways described above. While negative responses towards the headscarf initially might seem a “simple” case of religious discrimination, the reality is more complex. Rottman and Ferree rightly point out that “the challenge of intersectionality lies in practice at the point where ‘other’ women’s issues are framed as about their class or race [or religion] rather about gender as such” (2008, p. 503). Indeed, a closer look reveals that negative responses towards the headscarf are imbued with gender, through perceptions of patriarchal oppression, victimisation, backwardness and norms about female emancipation. As Muslim men’s bodies are generally less “marked” by clear religious symbols, this issue affects women in particular.

Our qualitative interviews with second generation immigrant girls and young women and other key informants revealed complex and subtle manifestations of this type of discrimination in the labour market, which remain invisible in quantitative research that relies merely on employment numbers. From the interviews we conducted, it became evident that girls and young women tend to look for alternative vacancies, change employment sector (for example, from the private to the public sector), or avoid jobs with customer contacts, after initial rejections on the basis of the

veil. Girls and young women, especially when they feel vulnerable, postpone or reconsider wearing a headscarf, thereby concealing the initial discriminatory response of the employer. As the now twenty-two year old Souad (Dutch, of Moroccan origin), explained in the interview:

*I have worked for four years in a toy shop and when I applied my manager said: Yes, you can work here, but only if you will start not wearing a headscarf. [...] Then I was still young and naïve, and thought something like, it does not matter.*

The stories retrieved through qualitative research clearly indicate how discrimination against women wearing a headscarf in the labour market impacts on the career trajectories and personal decisions regarding religious expression beyond mere exclusion from employment.

*Gender Labour Segregation:* As has become clear, labour market discrimination also pertains to the types of jobs accessible to second generation young women. As highlighted by Laurence Roulleau-Berger (2009), for instance, while some second generation immigrant boys of North African descent find jobs in the lower ranks of the service economy – such as restaurants and construction – numerous girls of the same origin find jobs particularly in the commercial sector and in the cleaning and care-domestic sector (see Okba and Lainé 2005). The labour segregation of first generation female immigrants who are over-represented in, for example, the cleaning,

care and operational sectors (Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2010), is reproduced with the second generation, since career advisers and employment agency officers often advise girls, even those with higher education levels, to apply for jobs in these same sectors. This is illustrated in the interview with Samia (French of Tunisian origin, nineteen):

*Last year I went to the mission locale [French centre for employment and orientation] to have information on jobs available for me and to have orientation on how to write and improve my CV etc. The woman in the office told me that the jobs available were in cleaning services, domestic and care work. I told her: "No way! I have a bac! [baccalaureat]."*

On the other hand, girls that come from the lower education sectors experience difficulties in deciding on vocational training, as they receive little guidance and support from both schools and family (Severiens et al. 2007). This often results in taking decisions based on what is perceived to be a “safe” option: for example, following the same vocational training as most of their friends, or choosing courses that have a reputation of being easy. The specific gendered dimension is expressed in the fact that these girls are over-represented in the care and social sector, especially those working with children. These professional directions, with an evidently ‘feminine’ character, are seen as safe choices, easy to communicate to others and with minimal chances for rejection by, and disappointment for,



family and society.

*Gender and Employment Norms:* Young women of any background have to negotiate (expectations and assumptions about) family life and work. Similar to the educational terrain that is distinguished by a range of (implicit) gendered norms with discriminatory effects, the same is true both for the labour market and the private sphere. As these norms assume different forms, their effects also change. It can tentatively be suggested that while, as one of the NGO workers in Denmark stated in the interview, “*the role of the hard working quiet girl*” pays off in an educational context, it is not conducive to obtaining a high status job.

Some of the women from the ethnic groups focused on in this study are relatively young when they marry and have children compared to their “native” counterparts, though there is also evidence that second generation young women increasingly postpone marriage in order to increase their career opportunities (Crul and Doornik 2003). Quite a few girls expressed the desire to work but also indicated that, when they had children, they would take over the main caring responsibilities and reduce their paid work.

The research of Nielsen et al. (2003), which documents the lack of significant economic return on second generation women’s educational investments in Denmark, finds that their labour market success is best explained by the variable of parents’ integration in the labour market and educational levels, which has a much less pronounced effect for other

groups. However, their suggestion that “these results indicate that parents’ attitudes concerning the role of women is a major explanation behind the gap in labour market success of second generation immigrant women and native Danish women” (Nielsen et al. 2003, p. 782) seems too premature and risks cultural stereotyping, though it merits further research.

More in general, research on the forms of discrimination and the mechanisms of disempowerment experienced by second generation immigrant girls in the (transition to) the labour market should not (re)produce explanations in which such experiences are seen through “the prism of so-called cultural conflict” between the values of ethnic communities and the dominant society. Rather, it should delve into the more important questions about the foundations and origins of this conflict *in relation to* structural power inequalities (Jiwani 2005, p. 849).

### **Conclusion: Discontinuous Axes of inequality?**

In contrast with studies that take a deficit model which locates disadvantages on the side of the (second generation) immigrants for granted, we have argued for the need to place special importance on mechanisms of discrimination, particularly as they result from the intersection of class, “race”/ethnicity, and gender. Our inquiry thus – in line with the findings of other studies on second generation immigrants at school and in the labour market in Europe – shows that the paths of immigrants children’s “integration” are characterised by significant segmentation (see Portes and

Fernandez-Kelly 2008; Vermeulen 2010). Instead of patterns of linear assimilation, today's second generation youth in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark and the UK experiences disadvantages that are largely due to their ethnicity and social class. Nonetheless, the segmented trajectories of integration/assimilation of second generation youth need to be read through the lens of intersectionality theory in order to understand the complex mechanisms in which generational and social-historical factors interplay.

In the educational context, inequality is experienced particularly in the form of language gaps, early drop out, poor performance and attendance at vocational schools, all elements which are largely due to North African and South Asian families' low socio-occupational status, low education levels, unemployment and urban segregation. In this context, gender intersects in complex and paradoxical ways. While girls in general perform better than boys at school, second generation immigrant girls' achievements follow, in part, this trend, as they show better results than their male counterparts. Their desire for emancipation, but also the "bridging" role they are asked to play, together with major family and community control, seem to favour girls' scholastic success. However, only a minority of these girls follow non-vocational secondary school paths and achieve university degrees. Yet, if gender seems to play an advantageous, although ambiguous, role at school, the opposite is true in the moment of transition to work and in the labour market.

Despite the fact that second generation youth in general finds more

obstacles than “native” youth in (the entry to) the labour market (for example, facing longer waiting times before obtaining their first job or entering into self-employment due to lack of other opportunities), there are specific forms of discrimination which are distinctively gendered. First, career advice offices and ethnic social networks tend to channel second generation girls towards those jobs that are ‘reserved’ for immigrant women in Europe (cleaning services and care-domestic work), thereby reproducing gender-based social inequalities and segregated gendered and “racialised” labour markets. Second, the labour market is marked by a range of often implicit norms with discriminatory effects, particularly for women. One possible reason is that, while obedience and discipline are traits for which women can be rewarded in the educational context, the opposite is true on the labour market, where more “masculine” traits – competitiveness, confidence and self-promotion – can lead to a higher status job. Finally, discrimination against women wearing a headscarf is very high, and it impacts on the career trajectories and personal decisions on religious expression beyond mere *exclusion* from employment.

These results thus show that the intersection of class, gender and “race”/ethnicity, which is at play at the structural, institutional and discursive levels, works in variable ways. While gender seems partly to benefit female immigrant youth at school, gendered disadvantages are experienced particularly in (the transition to) the labour market. This highlights the necessary acknowledgement of the “discontinuity” of axes of inequality that are manifested in different ways, according to specific

contexts, institutional settings and moments of the individual's life cycle. At the same time, our emphasis on the continuities between the first and second generation of immigrants, which are mainly due to disempowering dynamics created by working class belonging, shows the force of structural inequalities. We argue, therefore, that axes of discrimination interact in specific ways, in particular historical contexts and locations as well as in determinate stages of second generation youth's biographies, while neither reifying nor disavowing the categories that are present at that conjunction. In this respect, intersectionality theory has proven to be a very useful tool for the understanding of the ways in which the macrostructures of social division interplay with the microstructure of subjective experiences and relationships. A crucial step for future research will be to combine quantitative and qualitative studies in order to allow a cross-national comparison of the different aspects of intersectionality outlined in this article and to tease out the complexity of the interaction between axes of inequality in particular "race"/ethnicity, gender, class and religion and the ways they interplay at the junction between systemic/institutionalised forms of discrimination, discursive devices and the individual's life cycles.

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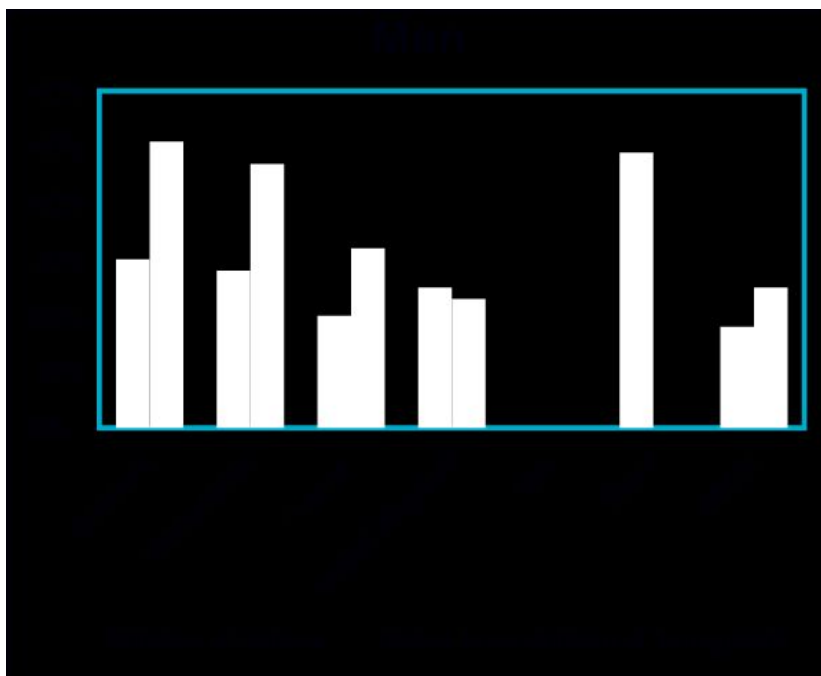
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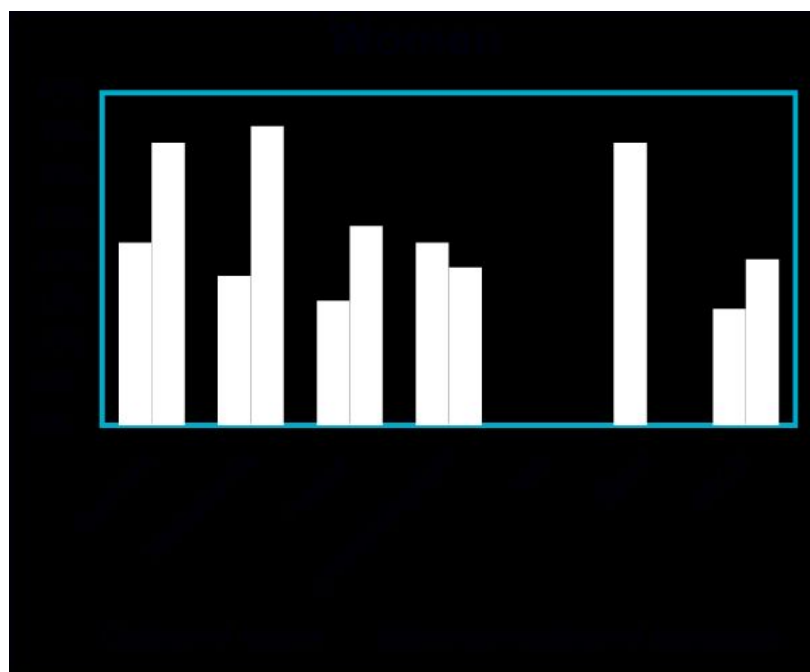
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**Figure 1a.** *Share in low educational attainment of children of natives and native-born children of immigrants aged 20-29, by gender around 2007.*



*Source:* Our elaboration on OECD data (2009, p. 34). OECD refers to the average of all countries for which full data are available. Figures for children of natives and native born children of immigrants are not available for Italy. Figures for the native born children of immigrants are not available for Spain.

**Figure 1b.** *Share in low educational attainment of children of natives and native-born children of immigrants aged 20-29, by gender around 2007.*



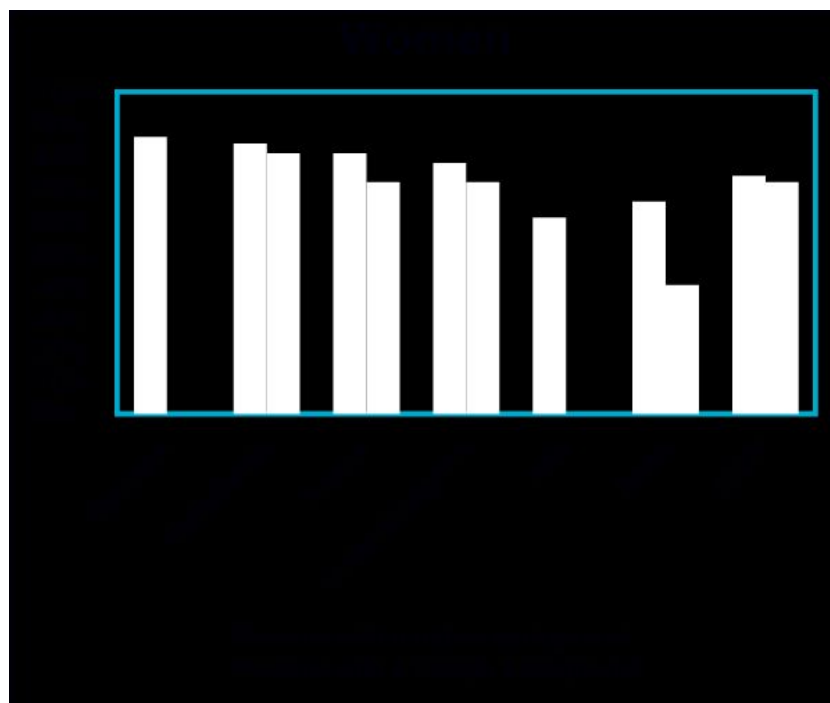
*Source:* See table 1a.

**Figure 2a and 2b.** *Employment rate of persons aged 25-54 by type of background and gender, 2008 (%)*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Eurostat refers to second generation immigrants who are native born with both parents foreign born as “persons with a foreign background”.





*Source:* Our elaboration on Eurostat, LFS 2008 data (see EUROSTAT 2011, p. 142). Figures for persons with a foreign background are not available for Denmark and Italy.

